



CRISIS NEGOTIATOR



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TEAM PROFILE

Hartford, Conn. PD's CNT

By Jose L. Lopez, Sr.



(l-r) Lt. John Horvath, Officer Guiseppe Uccello, Sgt. Robert Allan, Det. Luldes Ortiz, Deputy Chief Jose L. Lopez, Sr., Sgt. Norman Godard, Det. Frances Dubose-Watson, Det. Mark Manson, Lt. Brian Foley. Team members missing from photo: Det. Dan Mui, Sgt. Robert Klin, Officer Harry Garcia.

Once a fort called "The House of Hope," Hartford is now a diverse city with all of the pain and challenges of the average urban environment. It is managed under a strong mayor form of government with a board of Common Council. Hartford now has a population of 150,000, a number that swells considerably during the workday.

The city is being revitalized with the opening of a new convention center, multiple hotels, shops and restau-

rants. The downtown area is being reconstructed through the addition of condominiums and rental apartments. The Hartford Civic Center is also being remodeled with the addition of a high-rise apartment complex being built above the existing structure. Hartford is the rising star of New England.

The Hartford PD has an authorized strength of 440 sworn officers and is striving to meet this manpower level. For the past several years the department

has been actively recruiting and graduating academy classes to make up for attrition and to bring the department to full strength.

Under the direction of Chief Patrick J. Harnett, the department has instituted a neighborhood policing plan that breaks the city into four separate districts, assigns an individual district commander to each one and makes them responsible for addressing the problems that arise in their districts. Through the



Sgt. Robert Allan in the mobile command vehicle with equipment.

use of Comstat, district commanders are held accountable for the activities in their districts. This has led to double-digit reductions in Part One crime throughout the city.

The team

The Hartford Police Crisis Negotiation Team has been in existence since the late 1970s, in line with the creation of New York City's Hostage Negotiation Team. In 2003, the name was changed to the Crisis Negotiation Team to reflect the fact that the team's response goes beyond the relatively rare hostage situation.

Like most other police departments, the CNT was understaffed, under-equipped and minimally trained with the least amount of resources allotted among all of the specialized units. For years the team consisted of one sergeant and three negotiators lacking in equipment.

In 2002, then-Lieutenant Jose L. Lopez, Sr. was selected to command the team. Lt. Lopez expanded the team through a competitive process. In recruiting members, consideration was given to their linguistic abilities. This process produced a team capable of negotiating in many languages including Spanish, Italian, Polish, Russian and various dialects of Chinese and Middle Eastern languages. Each member has at-

tended a 40-hour negotiations course as well as continual seminars and updates as they become available.

The team has monthly training and has also trained collaboratively with the bomb squad and emergency response team. Training has been conducted with the Connecticut State Police and other area departments as well. As a team, members have joined with various teams in Connecticut along with the Department of Corrections for training seminars. The team has also traveled to New York City and participated in various training events with NYPD's Hostage Negotiation Team.

The team currently consists of twelve members. After his promotion, Deputy Chief Lopez appointed Lt. John Horvath as the team commander with Lt. Brian Foley and Sgt. Robert Allan as team supervisors. The remaining nine negotiators consist of patrol officers, detectives and sergeants. All of the negotiators work at the same level regardless of their rank or assignment. Deputy Chief Lopez continues to oversee the team and participate in the monthly trainings.

The commander and both supervisors, except in emergency situations, do not negotiate. During a call out, the commander will respond with one supervisor and a minimum of four negotiators. One negotiator serves as

the primary, another as the coach, with the other two negotiators gathering intelligence and conducting interviews. The supervisor will assist with updating the board and the commander will make resources available while keeping the command staff posted. Normally a member of the emergency response team is assigned to the crisis negotiation team as a liaison.

Equipment

Prior to the purchase of the CNT's current throw phone system, the team used a system featured in a previous issue of the *Crisis Negotiator*¹ which was purchased from Radio Shack.

As the team expanded and responded to various incidents, lessons were learned, causing the team to enhance their response and use of equipment. During a call out it became apparent that the team had to monitor all television media reports when involved in a negotiation. The call involved a subject who had barricaded himself in his home with several rifles. At one point during the negotiations it was learned that the subject was monitoring the local news and would be angry if the media referred to him as crazy. All television media were coached, and although he was safely negotiated out, subsequent investigation revealed that among the items that the subject was stockpiling was a portable television set with batteries.

After this incident three A/C-D/C 9-inch black and white television sets were purchased from Radio Shack. Both D/C and auto accessories were purchased so that the televisions could be operated from an electrical outlet or car lighter outlet. Batteries were also purchased in the event that electricity is not available.

All three television sets were connected together with a metal strip on the top of the sets. All of the accessories were also connected together so that the sets can be run from one electrical or car lighter outlet. The cost of this media



Mobile command post with portable light and generator.

setup totaled less than \$200. These sets have been used at various call outs. In the event that the incident receives national attention, the availability of cable television will be considered in identifying a command post. This insures that the team is aware of what the subject may be watching and how much information he or she is getting about the police response during the news reports and updates.

During the past year, CNT Supervisor Sgt. Robert Allan has researched and identified equipment that would facilitate the negotiation process. Special attention is lent to allocating the best means of communications which can be used under most situations while providing the safest possible environment.

After acquiring a donated ambulance, Sgt. Allan retrofitted the vehicle as a mobile command post for the CNT. This included placing dry erase boards and work stations for the team in the vehicle. Storage space was also adapted so that the equipment could be secured in the modified ambulance. The vehicle has been fitted with four wireless cameras that can be positioned outside the command post to monitor the exterior of the scene. Dollies and hand trucks were purchased in the event that the team had to move from the vehicle into a structure. Sgt. Allan kept flexibility in mind when

he identified equipment to purchase and as the vehicular command center was being designed.

Sgt. Allan set up the 007 Direct Link Throw Phone System that was purchased and outfitted the system so that it could be accessed from outside of the mobile negotiation command post by the Emergency Response Team and the chiefs' command post. In this way both the chief's staff and ERT commander can monitor the situation as it unfolds in real time both visually and audibly. This minimizes interruptions of the negotiations for updating purposes. The system is also set up so that if the negotiation goes into a tactical mode, full control of the video and audio system can be diverted to the ERT commander for response. This system is adaptable for a throw phone, landline and cellular phones.

During one call out, the need arose for a portable generator and lighting due to the staging location. The team has since purchased and installed a portable generator as well as portable spotlights, additional wiring, extension cords and tool boxes in the command vehicle.

With the increased use of the cellular phone and the difficulty in identifying carriers that control a subject's service, a means by which to interrupt the service was sought. To this end, Sgt. Allan

tested and chose the MSD Level Cellular Disrupter. This unit is also used for high-risk search warrants to keep the targets from being called by their associates and advised of any tactical approach.

The downside to the cellular disrupter is that it interferes with all portable radio transmissions as well. Since the unit has a limited effective distance, it is placed as close as possible to the subject's location so that it does not interfere with the radios of the responding officers. During search warrants the activation of the disrupter is always minimized and a detective is assigned to it so that he can turn it off after the door is breached.

Training

The combination of training and available equipment has increased the ability of the CNT to confidently respond to any incident. Recently a few of the negotiation responses in different parts of the state have involved police officers as the barricaded individuals. This presents added considerations in respect to the subject's training and knowledge regarding law enforcement procedures and the negotiation process. It also raises issues as to who should conduct the negotiation. Due to the likeliness of such a situation occurring in our municipality, the CNT has been partnering with other area departments so that we can assist each other in such incidents. We also train together in the event that members from these other departments are needed to assist in any call outs where the subject or victim is a current or former Hartford police officer. These partnerships will also make the Hartford PD negotiation equipment available throughout the region.

The Hartford PD, in partnership with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, formulated a program known as the Crisis Intervention Team. This unit is comprised of officers who are specifically trained to respond to incidents involving individuals who are identified as being

mentally or emotionally challenged. These officers respond to deescalate situations where a mentally or emotionally challenged individual has offered resistance and has taken a potentially violent stance during a call for service. Most of the members of the CNT have also attended this 40-hour training and are cross-trained in order to respond to these events. These CIT responders address situations where the subjects are not armed, are not holding anyone hostage and have not barricaded themselves. During these responses intervention is the objective, not negotiation. Both teams are separate units.

Significant incidents

August 2003: Members of the patrol division were dispatched to a complaint of a burglary suspect observed in front of a building. When officers made contact, the suspect ran into the building to the second floor where he entered an apartment and barricaded himself in the bedroom. Occupants of the first floor apartment reported that they had observed a handgun sticking out of the subject's pants pocket. The suspect would not respond to the various requests from the officers to surrender. Officers set up a perimeter and requested a response from the Emergency Response Team and the Crisis Negotiations Team.

CNT member, Officer Harry Garcia, was on duty at the time and was called to the scene. He and other officers, using a shield, took a position outside the apartment and attempted to communicate with the suspect. The subject was not responsive. The ERT responded and set up an inner perimeter. Patrol units cordoned off the area. An ambulance was requested and stood by at the scene.

Preliminary attempts by CNT personnel to communicate with the suspect were unsuccessful. Learning that the apartment did not have active telephone service, West Hartford PD was contacted to lend their throw phone system, which was delivered quickly and set up in the mobile command post.

Family members were interviewed as they arrived on-scene. CNT members

learned that the subject was a unemployed 35-year-old Hispanic male who was divorced with two sons. He was known to be addicted to heroin, using ten bags a day. It was unknown whether he was aware that his mother had suffered a heart attack the night before and was in the hospital. He had attempted suicide several times and family members were upset with him for stealing from them. Four of his brothers had died from alcohol or drug abuse.

Members of the ERT brought the

The subject had a firearm placed against his own head. While yelling at the ERT members the subject pointed the gun at the officers and then back to his head.

throw phone to the door of the room the subject was in. The suspect opened the door to the room as the phone was being delivered and confronted the ERT members. The subject had a firearm placed against his own head. While yelling at the ERT members the subject pointed the gun at the officers and then back to his head. During this time the subject repeatedly asked the officers to shoot him. ERT Detective Jose Rivera proceeded to speak to the subject in Spanish, successfully getting him to pick up the throw phone and re-enter the room where dialogue with Officer Garcia began at 1528 hours. ERT members used great restraint in this confrontation and backed out of the area as the subject re-entered the room.

During the negotiation the subject indicated that he was concerned about going to jail. He further stated that he was aware of his mother's condition. As Officer Garcia talked him away from the suicidal comments that he was making, the subject made a demand for heroin. Subsequently realizing that he was not going to get the heroin, the subject asked for cigarettes and water.

The water and cigarettes were delivered. The subject had reservations about opening the door to retrieve the water and cigarettes, fearing that he would

be hurt. During this time the suspect stated that the gun he had was not real. Officer Garcia asked that he throw the gun out the window since there was no way the police could confirm that it was a facsimile. The subject refused to throw out the gun but Officer Garcia was able to convince him to take the water and cigarettes.

The subject related that he wanted to be taken to the hospital and also wanted

to speak to his sister. Officer Garcia informed him that he would be taken to a hospital and would be allowed to speak to his sister. After further conversation between Officer Garcia and the subject, the subject agreed to surrender.

Officer Garcia initiated an exit plan, which began with the subject throwing out the firearm. The subject threw the gun out the window and then opened the door, surrendering to the members of ERT. At approximately 1730 hours the subject was taken into custody.

After being secured in a cruiser, Officer Garcia spoke with the subject and allowed him to speak to his sister as was promised. The subject was subsequently transported to Saint Francis Hospital for evaluation prior to booking.

The following observations were made during the post-incident debriefing:

- The use of the throw phone and the wireless public address system were invaluable. The team felt it was necessary to acquire such equipment.
- A heavy duty cellular phone could have been used to initiate negotiations and introduce the subsequent throw phone, avoiding a confrontation.
- The location chosen was adequate.
- The availability of the small televi-

sion sets enabled the team to know on a real time basis what was being reported and what the subject could be watching. Although no news was broadcasted during the negotiations, it was learned that the subject had a television set in the room.

In assisting the Newington PD, the Hartford CNT set up with the West Hartford negotiation team providing the equipment that included a 20/20 Rescue Phone. A member of the Newington negotiation team assisted in obtaining intelligence while a member of the State

ment was flooded with water during which time the subject took his own life with his rifle.

Until this incident, the Hartford CNT had not lost a person during a negotiation. It was apparent that this subject was intent on committing suicide with the aid of the police. He had no intention of communicating with negotiators.

The information gathered by the negotiation team through the use of the 20/20 Rescue Phone system gave the ERT members an advantage in dealing with the subject.

We shall never forget Officer Peter Lavery.

It was apparent that this subject was intent on committing suicide with the aid of the police.

December 2004: December 30, 2004 was a day that challenged the mission statement of the team. At 2030 hours, Officer Peter Lavery of the Newington PD responded to a single-family home on a domestic violence complaint. In the course of his investigation Officer Lavery was shot as he walked down into the basement where he encountered the subject who fired multiple rounds from an automatic rifle.

Police Team utilized a wireless public address system.

At the start of the negotiations there was a belief that Officer Lavery was still alive, but as the night progressed and with the information gathered from the cameras and sound system of the 20/20 Rescue Phone, it became apparent that Officer Lavery had not survived the shooting.

The subject was a ten-year veteran of the Department of Corrections who had been terminated some years before and was a survivalist with an automatic rifle, many rounds, night scope and gas mask. The subject exchanged gunfire with emergency response members and barricaded himself in the basement, setting up various attack stations. The subject was also using the furnace exhaust to clear the basement of gas and the dryer exhaust to clear his gas mask.

The Hartford PD CNT set up across the street from the scene and spent the entire night trying to get the subject to engage in conversation with negotiators. Every possible method was used in an attempt to have the subject surrender. The subject answered the house phone when he was informed via the P.A. system that his cousin was calling. The subject let his cousin know that he had no intentions of surrendering and challenged the police to enter.

It became apparent that the situation was not negotiable. Multiple gas propellants were fired into the basement after both means of exhaust were covered. The subject sustained a gunshot wound from a countersniper. The base-

Conclusion

The current CNT has been working together for more than four years and is planning to expand in the near future through another competitive process. The Hartford PD CNT will continue to strive to work to embody its mission statement:

...to address, through a team approach, both hostages and/or barricaded persons situations with maximum safety to all involved. The team will also address life threatening crisis situations that require mediation in order to achieve a safe outcome. ◀◀

About the author



Deputy Chief Jose L. Lopez Sr. is a 22-year veteran of the Hartford PD and is currently the South Division Commander. He oversees the Hartford PD CNT as a concurrent assignment. He is also an adjunct POST-certified instructor at the Hartford Police Academy.

Endnote

1. Farias, William, "Clearwater, Fla. PD Creates RDV from Child's Toy," *Crisis Negotiator*, Fall 2003, p. 7.

First Annual Upper Red River Valley Crisis Negotiation Competition & Conference

University of North Dakota
August 8 – 10, 2006
\$50 per team member

Modeled after the highly successful competition/conference held annually at Texas State University – San Marcos. Teams will participate in realistic scenarios and will be judged on their use of established negotiations practices and principles. Training day will offer a variety of negotiations-related seminars. Dr. Wayman Mullins, crisis negotiations expert and author, will be one of many featured speakers.

For additional information contact Lt. Michael Hedlund at: mhedlund@grandforksgov.com or 701-787-8016.